

A VISIT TO SHEIKH SULAIMAN MURSHID, THE ALAWITE "LORD"

By SQUADRON-LEADER RICHARD BELGRAVE

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IN June, 1945, the Alawite province of Syria was in an explosive state. To Major B— and myself the arrival of H.M. Destroyer *Musketeer* was welcome in the extreme. With half a dozen Signals personnel we had been the only British "forces" in the area. No time was lost in putting her Captain, Commander S—, in the picture, and very swiftly and surely did he grasp the essentials of a highly complex political situation. It was clear that we had to take steps to keep the Alawites quiescent in this quarrel between the Syrian Nationalists and the French, or our efforts to prevent bloodshed could not have been successful for much longer. The story of our doings in this little-known corner of the Levant is recounted as an example of an unusual combined political operation by representatives of all three branches of the Service.

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The Alawites constitute a religious sect of Islam, numbering some 350,000, and inhabiting the mountains just inland of Syria's 100 miles of Mediterranean coast. They are a minority to be reckoned with in Syrian politics, as they amount to roughly 10 per cent. of the population. In the main division of Islam into the two great sects, Sunni and Shiah, the Alawites are nearer to the Shiahs, while the great majority of the population of Syria are Sunni and nearly all the Nationalist leaders belonged to that sect. It was, therefore, inevitable that the Alawites should be somewhat suspicious of the Damascus Government. Alawite social life is still feudal and their religion secret: a curious blend, largely Islamic, but deriving certain characteristics from Christianity—for example, the belief in a Trinity—and from pagan and pre-Christian cults—for example, belief in reincarnation and the use of groves of trees for places of worship. Their prophets include Christ, Muhammad and Ali. Their women are not admitted to religious rites and are not regarded as possessing souls. The Alawites have the mountaineers' fondness for fighting, and have been enabled by their mountain country to preserve their identity through centuries of alien rule. Their standard of living is low and all but their feudal chiefs are poor. Perhaps the most important of these chiefs at the time of Syria's latest struggle for independence was Sulaiman Murshid, often referred to by the Europeans as "god."

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Sulaiman Murshid has never to me claimed to be in any sense a "god." On the other hand, it is estimated that some 50,000 people regard him as the incarnation of the divine and can be said to worship him in the sense that he is their absolute master. The Sulaiman Effendi, as he is known locally, is a shrewd man and knew that I had stated on several occasions that it was a "shame" for a man to pretend to any of the attributes of Allah. He later explained to me that he was the "Rabb" or "Lord" in the sense that he was "lord of the manor." I think, however, that he has on occasion found it profitable to be "the Lord" in as omnipotent a

prosperity of the region during the last twelve years resulted in the benefit of the Sheikhs who were quick to seize the meaning of the expansion in agriculture brought about by the introduction of the machines. They laid claim to vast areas of the best lands without opposition or control by the Government, and then rented these lands to machine owners, thereby getting rich at the expense of others and depriving the tribesmen of the possibility of tilling their own lands.

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The concentration of land in the hands of the Sheik and his family is greatest in the Shammar tribe and in the Jubur whether though the Chiefs of the tribe own the best lands, but the Tay tribesmen took to agriculture earlier than either the Shammar or the Jubur and many Tay villages are owned by the peasants.

This short glimpse covers the Arab population of Jazirah, and we turn now to the other elements in the population.

II. The Kurds

The Kurds have been and are a vital element in the development of Jazirah. Their original country is the mountains north of the plain. Their language and customs have dominated the country so that even the city dwellers of Mardin and Nisibin speak Kurdish besides Arabic and Turkish. The Kurdish migration to Jazirah started in earnest after the failure of the Kurdish rebellion against the reforms of Mustafa Kamal. Some Kurdish tribal chiefs sentenced to death migrated with their tribes to Syria. The French authorities welcomed them and they occupied the lands directly south of the border, greatly increasing in this way the number of Kurds already in the region. The Arab tribes saw their lands diminishing, but not being yet land conscious, they were satisfied to claim tribute from the Kurdish villages, which was paid for several years.

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For the first time in perhaps nine hundred years, the French established law and order in Jazirah. The Kurds, farmers in their own country, began cultivating the plains. The land being fertile, the crops were good. The French authorities treated the Kurds well and the news of good crops and unbiased government treatment reached the Kurds just across the border. Migration became a continuous operation from the mountains to the villages of the plain. There were no obstacles to this movement either on the Turkish or the Syrian side, and the immigrants joined their cousins and relatives across the railway line. For this reason, and because a census was never taken, it is very difficult to estimate the number of Kurds in the Jazirah.

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562 But proofs of their increase are the hundreds of new villages tilled
361 by Kurds and built by them in the regions of Kubur el Bid, Amuda,
and Derbassiya.

621 The Kurds like the Arabs, follow a tribal organization. Starting
221 from the east, the Koshar tribe, mostly nomadic but recently turning
619 to agriculture, dominates Jazirat ibn Amr, i.e., the region of
721 Deink and Ain Diwar. The Koshar border Shammar on the south and
they are on fighting terms because Nayefz Pasha, chief of the Koshar,
killed the brother of Dham, chief of Shammar. Next to the west is
the Shitiya tribe around Kubur el Bid. This tribe is old in the region.

[291] Its members are Arab in their dress and, in contrast with all the other
191] Kurdish tribes, they speak Arabic as well as Kurdish. Its lands lie
west of Shammar and more within the Tay region but its relations
with both are friendly.

619 Qamishli, which is a Tay region, includes villages of the Pinar
361 Ali tribe. But west of Qamishli comes a solid bloc of 100% Kurdish
villages extending for more than sixty kilometers and reaching to
the west of Dirbassiya practically uninterrupted by any Arab village.

[134] This area is undoubtedly one of the most fertile of Jazirah. Within
it, the Dakkuriya tribe is centered around Amuda, then follow the
Kikiya around Dirbassiya, and the Milliya from Dirbassiya to Ras el
Ain.

463 The Kurds are considered very good farmers. They plow and
241 plant with mules but they rent combines for the harvest. This is
577 because they have learned that combine harvest is more economic-
511 al. The Kurd is also greatly praised for his character. He is truth-
ful, honest, and upright in his dealings. He keeps his word and the
merchants of the Jazir trust him completely. He is also clean in
his home and in his dress, and though Bedouins reproach him for not
being generous in his house, his standard of living is higher than the
Bedouin and his villages are much cleaner.

622 The Kurds owe allegiance to their Agha who takes the place of
423 the Bedouin Sheik. But this relationship is weaker than is the case
of the Bedouins. The successive Governments did not give the Agha
grants of money or similar authority over his tribesmen in the man-
ner of the Sheik. The Kurds were considered from the start seden-
tary people subject directly to Government laws. That is why most
of the Kurds own and till their lands in their own right.

III The Shashans

• J63 The Shashans, a Circassian tribe around Ras el Ain, complete
167 the rural population of Jazirah. They migrated to Syria during the
463 Ottoman rule and settled as mercenary soldiers. They are not good
134 at agriculture and their lands are not fertile and do not compare with
those of the Kurds.

IV. The Christians

1621 The cities and commercial centers of Jazirah are an extra-or-
361 dinary mixture of races and creeds, but they are perhaps more than
80% Christian. This is true of Kubur el Bid, Qamishli, Amunda, Dir-
bassiya and Hassakeh.

361 As in the case of the Kurds, the Turkish massacres of the Christ-
167 ians in Mardin and the mountainous country around it started their
463 migration to Jazirah. The Christians reached Jazirah without proper-
429 ty or capital with which to begin. They settled mostly in the towns
mentioned. A few of them already owned lands, others were traders
and had previous relations with the Bedouins and Kurdish tribes. In
a relatively short time the towns grew and flourished. The Christians
prospered from commerce before the expansion of agriculture. The
tariff differences between Syria and Turkey on such important com-
modities as sugar, tea, and coffee and the intermingling of the Kurd-
ish population on both sides of the frontier, made the Jazirah towns
ideal for an extensive smuggling business.

438 The town Christians also served as middlemen to the merchants
463 of Aleppo, who provided the money to lend to the Bedouins and Kurds
452 or to buy the sheep, cattle and crops. This work on a commission
429 or partnership basis coupled with the smuggling business proved profit-
able to the merchants of Jazirah, so that during the last twenty years
many of them have become wealthy and have come to own real estate
and agricultural lands and machinery without, however, abandoning
their commercial activities with the merchants of Aleppo. In fact,
the general prosperity and development of Jazirah has increased its
need for the credit of Aleppo.

1621 This picture of the Christian population of Jazirah is not complete
J63 without mention of the Christian peasants who migrated from the
191 mountain villages and settled in the country. Though Christian and
795 living in villages 100% Christian, some of them are Kurdish in their
language, dress and customs. Some other villages are populated

by Syriac Christians who speak Syriac and Arabic. A few villages are completely Armenian. Most of these villages are around Kubur el Bid and Qamishli. These Christian peasants are very devout. They are also conservative and always remember the injuries inflicted upon them in Turkey. There is hardly a Christian family in the towns or villages which did not lose a relative or a friend in the massacres. Therefore they are always on their guard against their Moslem neighbors and are always suspicious of the Government. Their bitterness is not likely to disappear for some time to come, and is a factor to be considered in the political development of Jazirah.

The Christians of Jazirah belong to all creeds and denominations. The largest community in numbers and in importance is the Syriac Orthodox, followed by the Armanian Orthodox. There are Chaldeans, Syriac Catholics, Armanian Catholics, Protestants, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Nestorians. It should be mentioned that what determines the origin and affiliation of a man in Jazirah is not his language or dress, but his Church. Thus a Kurd who speaks only the Kurdish language, who lives like a Kurd on the same standard of living, and who dresses like one, is yet an Armenian or a Chaldean or a Jacobite because he belongs to one of these Churches. His original language and customs have been lost by living for ages in a foreign environment. That is why one finds in Jazirah and the mountains beyond it the only Christian Kurds in the world. But in reality they are not Kurds. They are Armenians or Syriacs or Chaldeans who have adopted the Kurdish language and their true nationality can be known only by referring to their Churches.

A more recent concentration of Christians in Jazirah is constituted by the Assyrians around Tal Tamr on the Khabur. Following the massacre of the Assyrians in Iraq in 1933 and their expulsion from that country, the French in Syria gave them asylum, and the League of Nations appropriated funds to settle them along the Khabur. Lands were granted to them and villages were built in which motors and pumps were installed for irrigation. Nevertheless during these 19 years all the efforts appear to have been useless. The ten thousand Assyrians who migrated to Syria lead a wretched life. Their motors are not in a working condition, their crops are not abundant and they are now trying to sell their lands. The reasons for such a condition may be found in the fact that the Assyrians are not farmers and the lands given to them are of a poor quality.

During the French Mandate, the Christians of Jazirah, with the memory of the Turkish massacres still fresh, and considering all

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the tribe or collection of clans, held together by blood-relationship and regulated by customary law dispensed by chieftains who owed their position to a combination of birth and ability.

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Arab life and society were reflected in the literature of the Arabic tongue: a literature which at least in its early phases grew up in isolation, developing its own norms and methods. Later it was influenced by other literatures, but throughout its history it preserved a continuity of outlook and subject-matter and perfectly expressed the dreams, the convictions and the limitations of the people which produced it.

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The Arabian influences were brought into Syria by the successive waves of Beduin immigrants from Arabia; a few generations after the Islamic conquest they had permeated virtually the whole population, whether or not they were Arabian by origin. The popular morality, the folk-lore and the language of the people became Arabic, and the literate took pride in Arabic poetry and prose. Tribalism and loyalty to the clan or patriarchal family continued to be the bases of society even in conditions very different from those which had generated them. The depth of Arabization varies however from one part of the country to another. In certain sections of the coastal mountain-ranges Arab ways took longer to penetrate and perhaps went less deep than in the plains of the interior.

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The only important elements in the population which were not Arabized were the Kurdish and Turcoman tribes which at a later period had established themselves in the northern portions of the country, and some of which from being nomads had become semi-sedentary or sedentary. They however were not wholly isolated from the majority, since they were orthodox Moslems and possessed a tribal organization similar to that of the Arabs. There were also Armenians, Turks and Europeans in the larger towns.

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The Arab tradition was modified by the new economic conditions which the tribes found when they reached the Fertile Crescent. Those tribes which remained on the edge of the Crescent continued their pastoral life; but those which

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Uniate Churches: that is, those Churches whose members formerly belonged to one or other of the non-Catholic Churches, and at some time in the past acknowledged the papal supremacy and gave up doctrines which the Roman Catholic Church regards as heretical, but retained their own liturgies and certain distinctive features of discipline and organization. There are five Uniate Churches with important bodies of adherents in Syria and Lebanon: the Greek Catholic, Syrian Catholic, Armenian Catholic and Chaldaean Catholic Churches, which split off from the Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox and Nestorian Churches respectively; and the Maronite Church, which originally held the Monothelite doctrine that Christ has two Natures but one Will, and which returned to Rome finally and as a whole in the twelfth century. The Maronites, like the Syrian Orthodox and Assyrians, have a Syriac liturgy, and a Patriarch of Antioch, resident in Lebanon, as their spiritual head. There are comparatively few Roman Catholics of the Latin or Western rite.

- (v) The Protestants are the fruits of the labours of American and other missionaries during the nineteenth and present centuries.

The Jews are mainly Arabic-speaking and long-settled in the country.

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Of these religious communities, the Armenians (Orthodox and Catholic), the Assyrians and some of the Syrian Orthodox and Catholics are not Arabic-speaking and have, for the most part, come recently into the Levant States. The Armenians came originally from the Caucasus and have their own language and national traditions. Most of those now resident in Syria and Lebanon have entered the country during the last half-century, in consequence of the great massacres in Asia Minor (1895-1915), and more recently of the annexation of Alexandretta by Turkey.¹

Most of the Assyrians have been settled in Iraq since the

¹ See Chapter XI.

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 745 last war, when they were dislodged from their original homes
 563 in the Kurdish mountains; the Chaldaeans have lived in
 L the Mosul area of Iraq for many centuries. In 1933 a period
 795 of tension between a section of the Assyrians and the Iraqi
 563 Government ended with the killing of some hundreds of them
 by Iraqi troops. Several thousands in consequence crossed
 the frontier into Syria, and although some of them later
 returned to Iraq, others were settled in the Jazirah with
 assistance from the League of Nations. Their settlement
 became an integral part of the Syrian State in 1942.

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 [191] A large part of the Syrian Orthodox and Catholics still
 speak Syriac. They have been settled since before the coming
 of Islam in north Syria and south Turkey, in and around the
 Taurus hills, against which the wave of Arab influence
 exhausted itself. Thus they have been able to preserve their
 Syriac dialect which farther south has been replaced almost
 everywhere by Arabic. Many are, however, bilingual in
 Arabic and Syriac, and others have abandoned Syriac and
 are now Arabic-speaking.

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 563 There are certain other groups which resemble the
Armenians and Assyrians in not being Arabic-speaking, but
 unlike them are orthodox Moslems. The most important
 of them are:

- (i) The Kurds, of whom there are perhaps 200,000.¹
 They are mountaineers from the high country which
 links the Anatolian and Persian plateaux, and speak
 a dialect akin to Persian. Some of them have long
 been resident in the country, but others have emigrated
 in the last twenty years from their homes in the
 mountains of eastern Turkey, in order to escape the
 repressive measures of the Turkish Government.
 There are small numbers of Kurdish-speaking
 Yazidis, Alawis and Christians, but most of those
 who speak Kurdish as their native language are
 Sunnis.
- (ii) The Turcomans, who number perhaps 30,000. They
 came originally from Central Asia, and their language
 is a dialect of Turkish. Originally nomads, they
 have now become semi-sedentary or wholly sedentary
 cultivators of the soil.

¹ These figures are only rough estimates; there are no official statistics for national and racial minorities.

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- (iii) The Circassians, who are by origin Moslems from the Caucasus. They fled from their homes after the Russian conquest of the Caucasus in the nineteenth century, and were settled by the Ottoman Government along the western edge of the Syrian Desert, to prevent the encroachments of the tribes. There are about 20,000 of them. S
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- (iv) There are also a number of Yazidis, adherents of a secret dualistic religion and with a dialect of their own; but they are only a small offshoot of the main community in Iraq.

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With these exceptions the minorities are Arabic-speaking and have lived in Syria and Lebanon for many generations; akin to the majority in many things, their basic difference is one of religious loyalties. S
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The general nature of the problem which they raise can be stated briefly. It is a product of two factors: first, of certain traditional differences which linger on in a new age; secondly, of the varying relations of the different elements in the population to the process of Westernization.

Serious at any time, religious differences were made more serious in the past by the prevalence of the theocratic view of life; differences of religious belief involved different political loyalties and principles of social conduct. The theocratic view was the basis of the 'millet-system', which, while it allowed a certain autonomy to the minorities, also increased the completeness of their separation from one another and from the majority. This was particularly true of those minorities of which a large proportion lived compactly in a single area; they came to regard themselves, if they had not always regarded themselves, as a 'peculiar people' linked by no moral or political tie with their neighbours. To complete their isolation there was added the memory of injustices, real or imagined, which they had suffered at the hands of the majority. S
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The persistence of these divergences in the present age adds a new and complicating factor to the problem of Westernization. It is not only that different communities have different paths to tread if they are to Westernize themselves: for example, the problems of social organization

In the State of Syria two different types of minority problem exist. First, there are problems in regard to the protection and the rights of the 'scattered' minorities, which are in a minority in all parts of the country. Secondly, there are the problems raised by the existence of a number of 'compact' minorities: communities which, while forming a minority of the population of Syria as a whole, nevertheless possess a local predominance in certain regions of it. Here the question is not simply how to guarantee the security and rights of these communities, but what should be the political status and administrative organization of the regions in which they are predominant. There are two districts, those of Latakia and Jebel Druze, in which this question is important; and there is a third, the Jazirah, in which the position is similar in some respects, although very different in others. It will be convenient in the pages which follow to treat the situation in these three districts separately from that in the remainder of Syria.

Jebel Druze was mainly settled in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by Druzes coming from Lebanon as a consequence of internecine disputes, changes in the traditional balance of social power and increased interference by the Turkish Government and the Western Powers. They sought in the Jebel freedom to manage their own affairs without control or interference. They now constitute an overwhelming majority of the population; in 1938 there were approximately 62,000 Druzes out of a total population of 70,000, the remainder being mainly Greek Catholics and Orthodox.¹

Before the War of 1914-1918 the Druzes were almost completely autonomous; Turkish attempts to subdue them had at most a temporary success, and Turkish suzerainty existed only in name. They held aloof from the Sunni Arabs, and preserved in their isolation certain traits which might otherwise have been modified: suspicion of orthodox Moulema, resentment of all interference and attachment to their feudal organization and customary law. It is the persistence of these traits which has given rise to the political

¹ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Rapport*, 1938, pp. 220-1. The figures for Latakia, the Jazirah and the rest of Syria, given in the following sections, are from the same source.

563 problem of Jebel Druze. What degree of control should the French or Syrian authorities attempt to impose? How is the social system of the Druzes to be adapted to the needs of the present?

One answer to such questions (and it is that given by most French officials during the mandatory period) starts from the premise that the Druzes cannot be treated as ordinary members of the Syrian Arab people. What they need, it is said, is firm and enlightened administration which, while taking into account the strength of their conservatism, will aim at the same time at softening such of their customs as are incompatible with modern civilization. Such administration can best be given by officials drawn from their own great families, fortified by European advisers and modern education; it would be useless and dangerous to attempt prematurely either to assimilate them to the rest of the population or to modernize their social system.

The Arab nationalists start from the opposite assumption, that the Druzes are Arabs who by reason of their history and geographical isolation have developed distinctive customs and a particularist spirit; this spirit will only be strengthened by the grant of autonomy and may become so intense that the Druze resentment of interference will act as a permanent obstacle to unity and good government in Syria. What they need, say the nationalists, is to be given a consciousness of their solidarity with the Arab nation, into which they must be reabsorbed socially and politically. Either their claim to self-government should be denied, or else such administrative privileges as are given them should be limited both in duration and in extent.

Among the Druzes themselves there are parties which adhere to both these schools of thought, some who feel themselves Arabs and support the aspirations of the nationalists for unity and independence, and a smaller number who desire autonomy under European control and protection. But the majority probably have an equal fear of Arab and European interference, since both must ultimately lead to the break-up of their traditional and uncontrolled way of life.

563 The Druzes may be able to defend their isolation against the nationalists and against European powers for a time;
621 but their conservatism has other more formidable enemies. The whole feudal organization of their society is breaking up:

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the smaller landowners resent the domination of the greater, ⁵⁶²
 the peasants are restive under their lords. A small but ⁶²¹
 powerful class of educated young men is growing up which
 can no longer be satisfied either with the preservation of a
 closed and unchanging society or with Druzism as a system
 of belief. These social and intellectual processes are bound
 to alter the whole basis of the problem in the next generation
 or two.

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The district of Latakia includes the mountain-range known ¹⁶²
 as Jebel Ansariyah and the coastal plain at its foot. It is ⁷⁹⁵
 in some sense a natural unit, and the bulk of its population
 possesses a distinctive character. In 1938 its inhabitants
 numbered approximately 370,000, of whom 235,000, or
 roughly 60 per cent, were Alawis, 70,000, or about 20 per cent,
 Sunnis, 6,000 Isma'ilis, and most of the remainder Christians,
 mainly Greek Orthodox. In the town and immediate
 surroundings of Latakia itself, the Sunnis formed the largest
 single community.

The Alawis are the descendants of the indigenous inhabitants ⁷⁹⁵
 of the district, who have endured a number of conquerors ⁶³¹
 but have managed to preserve their individuality under
 varying forms. For the greater part of the Ottoman period
 the district was virtually autonomous while acknowledging
 the suzerainty of the Sultan; but during the nineteenth
 century the control of the Ottoman authorities was greatly
 extended. Local autonomy in practice meant local tyranny
 by the feudal lords, who were to a large extent Sunnis. This
 is indeed one of the differences between the situation in
 Latakia and that in Jebel Druze: whereas in the latter
 the predominance of the Druzes is unchallenged, in the former
 the Alawis are in a majority but the Sunnis constitute a large
 proportion of the landowning class. Moreover both the
 Sunnis and the Christians are at a higher level of education
 and political consciousness than the Alawis, who are them-
 selves sub-divided into sects and tribes and possess little
 communal consciousness.

Making allowances for local differences, what was said ⁷⁹⁵
 about the problem of the Druzes applies also to that of the ⁶⁴⁸
 Alawis. There are some, especially among French officials
 and missionaries, who believe that the first task is to raise

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and certain tribes among them persuaded to settle on the land. 000

Thus in the years between the two wars the Jazirah was ¹⁶² almost entirely resettled by immigrant groups. The greater part of the population are still Arab Moslems, but very many of these are nomads; and of the settled population, which in 1938 was estimated at 103,000, more than 20,000 are Christians, while probably a majority and certainly a large proportion of the remainder are Kurds.¹

Among the settled population the proportion of those whose ⁵⁶³ native language is not Arabic is much larger than in any other ⁷⁹⁸ part of Syria. Split up between a large number of sects and peoples, none of whom dominates the rest, and lacking the element of stability which an old-established population would give, the Jazirah presents a complex problem, the nature of which is determined by a large number of factors: tension between Christians and Moslems, and between Arabs and Kurds; the everlasting conflict between the Beduin and the sedentary population; and interference by Turkey and Iraq from just across the frontier.

Here, as in Jebel Druze and Latakia, there has long been a ⁵⁶² conflict between the greater number of French officials/ ⁸⁶ who insist that what the district primarily needs is good and special administration such as the Syrian Government could not give it, and the nationalists, who wish to make it clear from the beginning that the Jazirah is an integral part of Syria. Of the inhabitants, the Arab Moslems are for the most part nationalists, while many of the Arab and other Christians oppose them and claim autonomy. Opposition comes also from those Kurds who demand autonomy and who are being increasingly influenced by Kurdish nationalism. The Kurds ⁵⁶³ have a tribal organization, the most important tribal groups ⁶¹⁹ being the Barazi and Milli; and most of them have no political loyalty except to the tribe. The majority are opposed to Turkey and frightened of Arab rule, although there is a continuous process of assimilation to the Arabs; and some of them have a superficial attachment to France. It is only fairly recently that a nationalist movement has arisen among them, directed by the intellectuals in Damascus and elsewhere and organized in the 'Hoybun' party. It aims at the

¹ Another estimate for 1937 was as follows: Arab Moslems 41,000; Kurds 81,450; Christians 31,050; others 4,150; Total 158,550. To this should be added 8,000 Assyrians.

563 formation of a Kurdish State which should unite the different
 619 parts of the Kurdish nation, now divided between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. In general, however, the Kurds are still too hostile to government as such for nationalism to have made much headway among them.

The different sections of the separatists do not seem to agree upon anything except their opposition to Syrian rule; for the population of the Jazirah possesses no such cohesion as the Druzes and Alawis. They are a collection of refugees, with something of the refugee mentality.

162 In the rest of Syria—that is to say, in the six provinces of
 495 Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, the Hauran and the Euphrates—there were at the end of 1938, according to official statistics, 352,000 members of religious minorities out of a total population of about 1,941,000, excluding the nomads. Approximately 250,000 were Christians, 91,000 heterodox Moslems and 24,000 Jews. Thus almost 20 per cent of the total population belonged to religious minorities, and of those 20 per cent roughly two-thirds were Christians. Most of the Christians are Arabic-speaking, with the exception of the Armenians. There must also be taken into account the several thousand Circassians, Turcomans and Kurds who are Sunni Moslems and therefore not members of religious minorities, but who constitute racial and linguistic minorities.

The members of religious minorities are most numerous in the provinces of Damascus and Aleppo, in each of which they number over 100,000, out of a total population of 530,000 in the former and 750,000 in the latter; but it is in the provinces of Homs and Hama that they form the largest proportion of the population (about 35 per cent). In the other two provinces—those of the Hauran and the Euphrates—there are comparatively few of them.

184 The differences between the Arabic-speaking Christians and the Moslems may be exaggerated. They share a language, many social customs and traditions; they are in some sense a single people. But while this is true and important, it must also be remembered that they differ from one another not only in religion but also in certain of their intellectual, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS.

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186 individuals who are sympathetic to Arab nationalism. Such sympathy is widespread among the Greek Orthodox. (One reason for this may be that since the Russian Revolution of 1917 the Greek Orthodox have had no external 'protector' and so have had to understand the necessity of being on good terms with their neighbours.) Nationalist ideas are particularly strong in the younger generation, who imbibe them in school and elsewhere. The Uniates tend to be less sympathetic, partly because they are less conscious and proud of their Arab traditions; partly because they are much influenced by French Catholic missionaries and teachers; and partly because of all sections of the population they have been the best treated by the French authorities, so that any relaxation of French control would mean the loss of their privileged position.

The leaders of the nationalist movement have always professed the best possible intentions towards the Christians, and have been quick to disown anything which might give the opposite impression. The periodical crises of national feeling have often been accompanied by scenes of Moslem-Christian fraternization. This attitude on the part of the leaders springs from a genuine desire to create a national unity which will transcend religious differences and make them less acute; and also from the wish not to alienate Western opinion. While, however, the more moderate and responsible nationalists are tolerant on principle and by sentiment, there is a certain suspicion of Christians among their less enlightened followers.

563 The Druzes and Alawis in the six provinces are outlying sections of the larger communities in Jebel Druze and the district of Latakia respectively, and do not require separate discussion here. The Isma'ilis form a compact community in the province of Hama; they keep much to themselves and want only to be left alone. The Circassians are to be found in the Hauran, on the northern frontier and on the Euphrates; they still constitute a separate entity with their own language and customs. During the Syrian revolt of 1925 they were used as irregulars by the French authorities, and this made them more unpopular with the Arabs than before. Some of them have at times demanded local autonomy, but

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without success. Being Sunnis and living in mainly Arab regions, they will probably in time become assimilated. The Turcomans in the province of Aleppo have on occasion caused trouble to the authorities by their turbulence, but do not raise any special political problem. Kurds are also to be found in the province of Aleppo and there is a colony of several thousands in Damascus. From here and Beirut, the Kurdish nationalist movement is directed. Its main weight comes from the Jazirah, but it is strong in other parts of Syria, though by no means all Kurds are nationalists. Some of these scattered Kurds are nomads, others semi-sedentary or sedentary. There are several thousands of Jews in Damascus and Aleppo. They have been treated with tolerance broken by occasional incidents: in 1840, for example, the Jews of Damascus were accused of ritual murder. Like the Arabized Jews in general, they openly repudiate Zionism, and events in Palestine have not gravely affected their position; but in recent years many of them have emigrated to Palestine.

Finally, much of what was said about the Armenians in Lebanon applies to those in Syria. They are of particular importance in Aleppo, where more than 65,000 of them live; a large proportion of these have been settled there for several generations. They are prominent in many branches of trade and industry. Their failure to become Arabized is resented by many Arab nationalists; while the fact that as Christians they help to increase the Christian element in the population of the town arouses the hostility of some Moslems. But Aleppo is not a fanatical town; it is primarily a commercial centre, and much more tolerant of diversity and less liable to be carried away by political enthusiasms or hatreds than is Damascus.

Memories of the past have embittered the feelings of practically all Armenians towards Turkey. At the time of the Alexandretta affair,¹ the rumour that Turkey intended to claim the district of Aleppo caused a great stir among the Armenians of northern Syria. Had Aleppo been ceded to Turkey, this would probably have been followed by the emigration of large numbers of Armenians southwards.

¹ See Chapter XI.

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In Jebel Druze discontent developed later and more suddenly. The Druzes were not hostile to the Mandatory Power so long as the latter was ruled in its dealings with them by the agreement of 1921. An indigenous administration was established. Salim al-Atrash, a member of the leading family of the Jebel, was chosen as Governor by the Druze notables. His tenure of office was troubled, it is true, but this arose entirely from conflicts inside the Druze community. There were rivalries within the Atrash family; for example, Sultan al-Atrash revolted against his kinsman the Governor. Moreover, there was a growing movement of the smaller land-owners against the great families of the Jebel; the Druze feudal organization was beginning to crack.

In 1923, on the death of Salim al-Atrash, the Druze notables elected as Governor a French official, Captain Carbillet. He initiated a policy of administrative and social reforms. They were sincerely intended to improve social conditions in the Jebel, and were carried out with great vigour. But the novelty of his measures, the use of compulsory labour and other harsh methods to execute them, and a lack of tact about Carbillet's way of dealing with opposition, quickly alienated many sections of the population.

Until 1925 there was no open unrest; and there was no contact between Arab nationalist circles in Damascus and the malcontents in Jebel Druze. But in May, 1925, Captain Carbillet went on leave, and the unrest of the Druzes came to the surface in complaints against him and demands for the redress of grievances. These demands were not sympathetically received by General Sarrail, who had succeeded General Weygand as High Commissioner in November, 1924, and who had already aroused widespread hostility by his anti-clericalism, his disrespect for tradition and his clumsy handling of people. He increased the discontent of the Druzes by declaring that in his view the agreement of 1921 had only an historical importance, and he brought it to boiling-point in July, 1925, when on his orders three Druze leaders were lured to Damascus under pretence of receiving their demands, arrested there and sent into enforced residence at Palmyra.

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In July the Druzes rose in revolt under Sultan al-Atrash.

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afterwards the Governor found his position impossible and⁶³¹ was compelled to abandon it. He was not replaced, his⁶⁶⁴ powers being assumed in July by the High Commissioner's¹⁸⁶ Delegate.

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The Franco-Syrian Treaty of 1936 effected no formal change in the status of the Jazirah, but its signature was followed by the replacement of the French officials who had ruled it until then, by Syrian administrators. Here as in Jebel Druze and the Alawi region discontent soon showed itself. There were some who felt and expressed loyalty to the new national Government. But there was an important element which demanded that the ties between the Jazirah and the central Government in Damascus should be as loose as possible, or should be severed altogether. Their minimum demand was that the local officials should be chosen from among the local population; their maximum, for complete separation from Syria. Their discontent was increased by the lack of wisdom shown by some of the more irresponsible nationalists, although the Government itself acted on the whole in a conciliatory manner. The autonomists appear to have been encouraged by certain of the local French officials; the nationalists claimed, indeed, that here as among the Alawis and Druzes the minorities would have acquiesced in their rule had it not been for the activities of French agents. The separatists were themselves divided on everything except their dislike of being ruled by the nationalists of Damascus. Some were Kurds, who objected mainly to being ruled by Arabs; others Christians, who objected also to being ruled by Moslems. These two groups sometimes but not always acted together during the years from 1936 to 1939.

Serious trouble first broke out in June, 1937, when the⁶⁶⁹ Kurds of Hassetché revolted against the appointment of⁵⁶³ nationalist officials from outside the Jazirah. The rising was⁶³¹ quelled with the aid of the French military authorities, but it was soon taken up in Qamishli and elsewhere by the Christians, who demanded a special statute similar to that of Alexandretta, an administration which would give equal weight to the rights of all sects and races, and the withdrawal from the province of officials who had not been chosen from the local population.

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681 The disturbances reached their height in August, when a number of Christians in Amudah were killed in an altercation with a group of Kurds instigated by a Kurdish chieftain who supported the nationalist Government. The intervention of French troops and the removal of certain unpopular officials restored order for a time. But beneath the surface discontent continued, and the separatists began to form themselves into societies for the defence of their rights, with a central committee to co-ordinate their activities. In December, 1937, some separatists from Hassetteh kidnapped the Governor of the Jazirah, Tawfiq Shamiyyah, a Greek Orthodox Christian from Damascus; he was released after a few days, and his kidnappers were arrested.

The Governor was shortly afterwards replaced by a new one, a Moslem, who made a conciliatory statement of policy. It did not, however, appease the separatists. They demanded the release of those who had been arrested for kidnapping the former Governor, and also the dismissal of certain officials. When the new Governor failed to persuade the Syrian Government to yield to these demands, he was chased from the province. The separatists then drove out other nationalist officials, boycotted the administration and reaffirmed their demand for a separate government under French control.

While these events were occurring in the Jazirah, the separatist case was being urged in Paris and Rome by Cardinal Tappouni, the head of the Syrian Catholic Church, who had constituted himself the spokesman of those Christian minorities who were opposed to nationalist rule. In a memorandum submitted to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in November, 1937, he spoke of the possibility of a massacre of the Christians in the Jazirah and elsewhere, and made various proposals for avoiding it: that the religious communities should be given complete equality in religious and personal matters; that an equitable number of Christian officials should be appointed; that the Syrian Government should maintain, in districts where the Christians might be menaced, adequate means for their protection; and that a régime of decentralization should be introduced, such as to safeguard the interests of the minorities. The French Government, which was then negotiating with the Syrian Prime Minister in order to obtain more explicit guarantees, replied in a vague and conciliatory fashion.

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The situation remained as it was until the beginning of 1939, when agitation for the release of the kidnappers of the former Governor occurred. In June organized manifestations on a large scale took place in all the towns of the province; but the French authorities intervened and restored order.

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No sooner had the Franco-Syrian Treaty been signed than criticism of it began to appear in France. In part this criticism came from those who opposed the whole idea of a treaty, believing the Syrians to be still unfit for self-government. Others, while admitting a treaty of some sort to be desirable, were doubtful of the adequacy of the existing Treaty: because it aimed at creating a unitary State in a country so divided as Syria; or because its guarantees for minorities and its provisions for the maintenance of French military forces upon Syrian soil were insufficient; or else because it did not stipulate for the repayment to France of the expenses incurred in the administration of the Mandate.

These doubts were reinforced by the events of 1937: the Alexandretta question, and the growth of the separatist movements in Jebel Druze, the province of Latakia and the Jazirah. It was obvious that the French Chamber and Senate would only ratify the Treaty provided that they were reassured on these and certain other points. The Syrian Prime Minister therefore went to Paris in order to negotiate with the French Government an agreement upon the points at issue. He left Syria in November, 1937, and returned towards the end of December. The result of his visit was an exchange of letters between him and M. de Tesson, Under-Secretary of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dated December 11th, 1937. The letters included a further guarantee by the Syrian Government of its intention to respect all the rights granted by the Treaty to the minorities living under its sway; and an undertaking by the Government to accept the technical experts recommended to it by the French Government. The letters closed with a statement of the desire of both parties to continue the policy of co-operation.¹

These undertakings were accepted by nationalist opinion as being inevitable in the circumstances, and ratification of the Treaty was eagerly awaited. In March, 1938, indeed, Mardam

¹ See Appendix A4.

Chapter Ten

SYRIA

Distribution of Minorities

THE table on page 76 shows the distribution of the Syrian 000 population by religious confessions and provinces.

Written Guarantees

The Syrian Constitution issued in 1930 contains formal 641 guarantees for the good treatment of minorities. Article 6 states 563 that all Syrians are equal before the law, enjoy the same civil and political rights and shall not suffer discrimination on grounds of religion, race or language. Article 15 guarantees liberty of conscience and worship, and respect for the religious interests and personal status of all sects. Their educational and other rights are guaranteed by Article 28. Article 26 states that all Syrians are eligible for public offices without distinction. Finally, Article 37 lays down that the electoral law shall provide for the representation of confessional minorities. (This has in fact been done: every Chamber elected since the issue of the Constitution has contained an appropriate number of representatives of the minorities.)

Personal Status and Communal Organization

Until 1938, the law of personal status underwent much the same changes in Syria as in Lebanon. The same attempts were made to reform it, and met with the same obstacles. The most recent attempt was made in November 1938, when the High Commissioner issued a decree modifying and completing the decree issued in 1936 but never applied.

It met with bitter opposition, both religious and political. The Ulema objected to it on the ground that it contravened the Shariah. It allowed conversion from one sect to another, while the Shariah condemned apostasy. It gave to the heads of the communities the right of representing their communities *vis-à-vis* the authorities; but the Shariah recognised no such rights of representation. It laid down that the son should follow the

[Text continues on page 77 75 -- Analyst]

religion of his father in certain cases in which the two parents belonged to different sects, whereas the Shariah required him to follow the religion of his Moslem parent. 641 563

The Ulema presented a memorandum to the Nationalist Government of Jamil Mardam Bey, setting forth these and other theological objections and protesting against the decree. The Government was sympathetic to them, not only because of its desire to keep on good terms with orthodox Islam, but also because of the political circumstances of the moment. Franco-Syrian relations were strained, owing to the failure of the French Government to secure the ratification of the Treaty of 1936. The Syrian Ministry resented the way in which the decree had been issued by the High Commissioner, over its own head and that of the Chamber. When the Ulema presented their memorandum to the Prime Minister, he replied that his Government was not willing to accept the decree, and soon afterwards the Minister of Justice issued instructions to the Courts not to apply it.

Shortly afterwards, for this and other reasons, the Government resigned. The High Commissioner had triumphed on the constitutional question. Subsequently, however, in view of the passions which the decree had aroused, he issued a new one excluding Moslems from the application of the laws of 1936 and 1938. No further step to regularize the situation has been taken since then.

Divisions of the Country

The figures given in the first section show that there are three districts of Syria in which the Arab Sunnis do not possess a majority: they are Jebel Druze, where the Druzes are in the majority, Latakia, with a majority of Alawis, and the Jazirah, which is divided between Kurds, Arab Moslems and Christians of different kinds. It will be convenient to describe each of these districts separately before dealing with the remainder of the country. 631 563

Jebel Druze

Jebel Druze was settled in the course of the nineteenth century by Druzes coming from Lebanon in order to escape Turkish government, military service, foreign interference, Christian rivalry and in general all restrictions upon their liberty to follow 563

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●563 their traditional customs and manage their own affairs. The Druzes now constitute the overwhelming majority in the Jebel.

Before the First World War, the Druzes were almost completely autonomous. Turkish attempts to subdue them were not successful, and Turkish suzerainty was no more than a name. Their relations with the Sunni Arabs were equally distant. The isolation in which the Druzes lived throughout the nineteenth century helped to preserve certain elements in their society which might otherwise have been modified: dislike of all kinds of interference and attachment to their feudal organization.

The particularism of the Druzes would be a problem for any form of government. The nature of the problem, however, has been in some ways modified during the present generation. On the one hand the French encouraged the particularist spirit throughout the Mandatory period. They maintained that the Druzes could not be treated like the other sections of the Syrian population, but needed a special regime which, while taking into account the strength of their conservatism, would aim at modifying such of their customs as did not conform to modern ideas of civilization. Such an administration, they claimed, could best be given them by officials drawn from their own great families, controlled by French advisers and fortified by French education.

On the other hand, the rising nationalist movement starts from the assumption that the Druzes are Arabs who have developed peculiar customs and traditions by reason of their history and isolation. They need to be re-absorbed into the Arab nation, politically and socially, and to be made conscious of themselves as Arabs. Whatever special regime be granted them must therefore be limited in extent and temporary.

Among the Druzes themselves there are parties which support each of these two policies. There are those who desired and still desire formal autonomy under French protection, and others who want Jebel Druze to become fully a part of a Syrian or Arab State; there is also a very large group who want protection and interference from no one and wish only to be left alone. This conflict of ideas is related in various complex ways to the social conflict which is now beginning in the Jebel. The lesser land-owners are restless under the domination of the Atrash, the leading family of the region; and for the first time the peasants are beginning to question the feudal system under which they have lived for so long.

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The Territory of the Alawis

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The province or territory of the Alawis, also known as the Province of Latakia (its official name has been changed several times) includes the Jebel Ansariya and the coastal plain at its foot. It is in many ways a natural unit, and the greater part of the population which inhabits it possesses a distinctive character. Sixty per cent of the population are Alawis, and the others are in more or less equal parts Sunni Moslems and Christians, mainly Greek Orthodox. In and around the town of Latakia itself, the Sunnis form the largest single community.

The Alawis are probably descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of the district, who have endured a number of conquerors and have managed to preserve their individuality, with various accretions from the cultures and religions of their overlords. Under the Turks they possessed local autonomy while acknowledging the suzerainty of the Sultan, until the nineteenth century, when the Ottoman Government succeeded in imposing its authority upon them. In practice, however, local autonomy meant local tyranny, since the region, like the rest of Syria, was organized on a feudal basis and the peasants suffered the unrestrained rule of their lords.

The problem of the Alawis is in some ways similar to that of the Druzes: an isolated, backward peasantry, tenacious of its individuality, ruled by feudal lords and brought into contact, during the present generation, with a Western power having interest in Syria and with the forces of Arab nationalism. The divisions of opinion expounded in the preceding section exist here also. There are, however, certain additional factors which do not exist in Jebel Druze and which complicate the situation. First, the Alawis are divided among themselves into a number of sects; largely because of this, there is no ruling family as powerful among them as the Atrash among the Druzes, but a number of great families at rivalry with one another. Secondly, the existence of large Sunni and Christian communities gives rise to difficulties. In general they are more advanced than the Alawis; they form a large part of the town population, and in addition much of the land is owned by Sunnis. The Sunnis would never submit to be a minority in an autonomous Alawi region, the more so since nationalist governments in Damascus would probably favour them above any other section of the population. All the Sunnis and many Greek Orthodox desire

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563 the complete incorporation of the district in Syria; but others of the Christians would prefer it either to be autonomous or to be incorporated in Lebanon.

The Jazirah

Before the First World War, the Jazirah, the north-eastern province of Syria, was empty except for Beduin tribes and some Kurdish villages. The land was thinly cultivated, and the standard of living low; life was insecure and government scarcely existed. When the French occupied Syria, they established a certain measure of public security, and this increased the attraction for settlers which the Jazirah already had, by virtue of its fertility. The Mandatory authorities encouraged the settlement of members of Christian minorities who had been dislodged from their homes in Turkey by persecution. In the last twenty years many thousands of Armenians, Jacobites, Syrian Catholics and Assyrians, and in addition some thousands of Kurdish Moslems have moved into the province. New towns and villages have been created, new crops introduced and the district opened up to commerce.

The present population of the Jazirah falls into three main divisions. First there are the Arab tribes, of which the most important is the Shammar. Some of them breed camels and are fully nomadic; others have taken to raising sheep and become semi-nomadic, or else have turned into wholly sedentary farmers. Secondly, there are the Kurds, who are themselves split up in various ways. They are divided into tribes; in addition some are nomadic, others semi-nomadic and others again sedentary. There is a further distinction between those Kurds who have long been settled in the district and who are largely Arabized, and those who have come in during the present generation and still preserve their Kurdish language and characteristics. Among these, Kurdish nationalism is strong, and has been encouraged by French officials.

Thirdly, there are the Christian immigrants, who are divided among a number of sects. Some of them are Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox and Catholics, others Armenians; in addition, there are Syrian Orthodox and Catholics, Assyrians and Chaldeans who either speak Syriac or have abandoned it too recently for Arabic to have acquired any Arab national sentiment. Of them all, the Assyrians are those who have aroused the most interest

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in the outer world. About 9,000 of them have settled in the Jazirah since they crossed the frontier from Iraq during the troubles of 1933.¹ A Board of Trustees, appointed by the Council of the League of Nations and administering funds contributed by the Governments concerned and by the League, built villages and bought land for them. At the beginning of 1941, when their economic position was satisfactory, their special administrative and fiscal regime came to an end and they became an integral part of the Syrian State. Since then their economy has been dislocated by the enlistment of a large proportion of their members in the Iraq levies.

Split up between a large number of sects and peoples, none of which dominates the rest, and lacking the element of stability which would be furnished by a long-settled population, the Jazirah presents a complex problem which is intensified by a number of factors: tension between Christians and Moslems and between Arabs and Kurds; the eternal enmity of Beduin and settled folk; the influence of the clergy and particularly of French missionaries; and interference by Turkey from just across the frontier.

During the years of Mandatory rule, French policy was to give the Jazirah strong and sympathetic administration, and so enable the immigrants to settle down in their new homes, and also to keep the Jazirah separate from the rest of Syria. The nationalists, on the other hand, wish to avoid at all costs the creation of another problem similar to that of Jebel Druze or the Alawis; they therefore insist that the district must be ruled from Damascus, sympathetically but without any concession to separatist feeling. Of the inhabitants, some of the Beduin, Kurds, Greek Orthodox and other Christians are in favour of the rule of Damascus, but a large number both of Kurds and of Christians would prefer autonomy under Western protection. The most important advocate of autonomy is the Syrian Catholic Patriarch, Cardinal Tappouni. The Kurdish and Christian autonomists, however, although united in opposition to Arab nationalism, are not in agreement on many other questions.

The Arab Christians

Most of what has been said about the social and economic position of the Christians in the other Arabic countries applies

¹ See Chapter Eleven.

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●563 equally to Syria. The Christians still form a social unit, or rather a series of inter-connected social units, the relations of which with the Moslem community are largely formal. This is especially true of the older generation brought up under the Ottoman regime. The introduction of freer social customs from the West, the spread of education and the growth of the idea of the nation between them are helping to make the younger generation less conscious of its confessional ties, and may in the end succeed in breaking down the barriers between the sects.

Western ideas and forces have so far made little impression outside the few large towns. In the smaller towns and the villages, traditions still rule unchecked, and the old social exclusiveness of the sects still persists. But on the other hand the very nature of life in small towns or villages tends to the assimilation of the social characteristics of the minorities to those of the majority. Moreover, it encourages economic interdependence and co-operation. Economically, the Christian do not differ much from the Moslem peasants. It is only in the large towns that the economic structure of the Christian communities diverges from that of the majority. The educational progress of the Christians has been swifter than that of the Moslems, and has diverged from it in some ways. In 1938 the Christians accounted for about 32 per cent of the total school population, although they form only 19 per cent of the population as a whole. They account for an even larger proportion of the pupils of secondary schools; and although only 20 per cent of the students of the University in Damascus are Christians, many others are studying at the Universities in Beirut, or in Europe.

It must be noticed also that 32 per cent of the Christian students attend foreign schools, 61 per cent private schools and only 7 per cent official ones. Almost all the foreign schools are controlled by Christian missions, although some are owned by the French 'Mission Laïque', and about 170 out of the 294 private schools are controlled by Christian communities. Thus, the Christians are not only obtaining more education than the Moslems, but

563 871 it is education of a different sort. Individual Christians play an important part in the national movement, in Syria as elsewhere. The most prominent of them in recent times have been the brothers Faris and Faiz al-Khuri, the former of whom was President of the Chamber of Deputies from 1936 to 1939 and again in 1943-4, and became Prime Minister in 1944.

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It is not simply isolated individuals who feel sympathy with the national movement. Sympathy is widespread among the Greek Orthodox, who are altogether Arab in culture and feeling. This is true of the clergy as well as the laity, and of the higher clergy as well as the lower: the Bishop of Hama was Vice-President of the Pan-Arab Conference of Bludan in 1937. The younger generation, brought up under the influence of nationalistic ideas in school and out of it, tend to be as wholly devoted to the Arab cause as their Moslem contemporaries. 563 668

Roman Catholics and Uniates tend to be less sympathetic, partly because they are less conscious and proud of their Arab tradition; partly because they are much influenced by French Catholic missions and schools; and partly because of all sections of the population they have been the best treated by the French authorities, so that the relaxation of French control means loss of their privileged position. 563 668 177

The leaders of the national movement have always professed the best possible intentions towards the Christians and have been quick to disown anything which might give the opposite impression. The periodical crises of nationalistic feeling have been accompanied by scenes of Moslem-Christian fraternization. This attitude on the part of the leaders often arises from a genuine desire to build a national unity which will transcend religious differences and make them less acute; or else from a desire not to alienate Western opinion, which tends to care more for minorities than for majorities. 563 668

Although the more enlightened nationalists are tolerant, among those who are less enlightened there still exists considerable suspicion of the Christians as a whole. It springs not only from ancient prejudice; it is due to the fact that certain of the Christians, not wholly against their will, have been used by the French as instruments of domination and as a pretext for delaying the grant of independence. Once the problem of Franco-Arab relations is definitely settled, the tension between Moslems and Christians will gradually be relaxed.

The Armenians

In general, the Armenians in Syria do not need special attention. Most of what has been said about their fellow-countrymen in Lebanon is true of them also. It is necessary only to call attention to the special situation existing in Aleppo, where the Armenian 563

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● 563 element is particularly large and important. It numbers 60,000 ; many of these have long been resident in the town, while others came in during the period of persecution. Their economic position is strong. Almost wholly urban in occupation, they are particularly prominent in certain branches of trade and industry and a number of crafts. They are also numerous in the free professions, but there are few of them in government service because of their general ignorance of Arabic. As the largest unassimilated element in the population, their presence was at first resented by the nationalists, who regarded them as a complicated problem and an instrument of foreign interference ; the more reasonable nationalists understand, however, that the only possible policy is not to treat them as enemies but to help them to become loyal citizens and to be at least outwardly assimilated to the majority. There are some of the ' Tashnak ', the Armenian nationalists, who are opposed to any degree of assimilation and wish to preserve their culture and customs until such time as they can return to an independent Armenia. Others, however, and perhaps the larger part, are willing to co-operate with the majority and sacrifice something of their individuality, either permanently or at least until they can return to their own country. They are the more willing to work with the Arabs because of their fear of Turkey, which has increased greatly since the cession of Alexandretta. During the Franco-Syrian crisis of 1945, the Armenians as a whole threw in their lot with the nationalists and resisted all attempts of the French authorities to make use of them.

In recent years they have been much influenced by the U.S.S.R. and the favourable treatment which is being given to its smaller nationalities in political and cultural matters, and now in foreign affairs as well. It is probable that the majority of them would want to emigrate to Soviet Armenia if they were given the opportunity.

Other Minorities

Most of the minorities are of no great importance. Thus, the Jews in Damascus and Aleppo are small communities of craftsmen and traders, Arabic-speaking and externally assimilated. Many of them have emigrated to the New World and in general they are becoming Europeanized quickly. Although for the most part they are not Zionists, Zionism has affected them ; very many

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of them have settled in Palestine, and those who are left cannot be wholly unaffected by the rising wave of Arab hostility to Zionism. 563.

The Isma'ilis form a compact community, backward and without any political claims except to be left alone. The Turcomans also raise no problem in themselves. Originally a nomadic community, they have now become agricultural, and in some regions they have been completely Arabized. The Circassians, however, have resisted assimilation more successfully. They still remain as a separate entity with their own language and customs, and have even at times claimed autonomy. Both in Turkish times and under the Mandate they have been used by the authorities to hold down the population; the French for example used them to suppress the Syrian Revolution of 1925. This has made them disliked by the Arabs; but there is no obstacle to their ultimate assimilation.

The Kurds are of much greater importance. There are over 100,000 of them in the north of the country, mainly in the foothills of the Taurus north of Aleppo, and 20,000 in Damascus. Most of them have been in the country for generations, but some have fled from Turkey in the last twenty years. Almost all are Sunni Moslems, but there are some Kurdish-speaking Yazidis, Christians and Alawis. The language of the majority is Kurdish, but many are bi-lingual in Kurdish and Arabic, and some, particularly in Damascus, speak only Arabic. There is a gradual process of assimilation going on among them, helped by their backward cultural state; they have practically no facilities for education except in Arabic.

Originally nomads, they have now mostly settled on the land as peasants. They are dominated by their land-owning class, but less so than formerly. Although sedentary, they still preserve their tribal organization, and on the whole tribal loyalty is still much stronger among them than national loyalty.

In general, they are whole-heartedly opposed to Turkey, are suspicious of Arab nationalism, friendly to the U.S.S.R. and grateful to France for the favourable treatment they have received. 563
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Kurdish nationalism is strong among some groups of them, particularly those in Damascus. Damascus and Beirut, indeed, have become the main centres of the Kurdish national and cultural movement, directed largely by the Badr Khan brothers. The nationalists do not for the most part expect independence,

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563 but they claim autonomy in the Jazirah or at least the right
 668 to live as Kurds, immune from attempts to force them to assimilate.

French Policy

648 France's hostility to Arab nationalism led her to show special
 563 favour to the minorities in Syria. This policy revealed itself in numerous administrative acts, and in such military acts as the recruitment of special detachments from Circassians, Kurds and other minorities, but it is most clearly shown and has had the most important consequences in regard to the two compact minorities, the Druzes and Alawis.

648 In 1921 an agreement was concluded between the French
 563 authorities and some of the Druze leaders, providing for a national
 631 government assisted by French advisers. From this time until 1936 there existed a 'Government of Jebel Druze' independent of Syria and under all-pervasive French control. At first, French policy ran counter to local susceptibilities, and this led to the Druze Revolt of 1925, which became a Syrian national revolt. After the suppression of the revolt, the same system was continued, and was formalized by the Organic Law of 1930. Its effect was to encourage the particularist feeling of the Druzes and to arouse among certain of them a feeling of gratitude to France.

Another autonomous territory was created in the 'Territory' or 'Government' of the Alawis, set up in 1920. It possessed an administrative system similar to that of Jebel Druze, formalized in a similar organic law issued in 1930, and under a still stricter French control. The administration did something to improve the very backward condition of the Alawis and to arouse among them a corporate self-consciousness and a feeling of attachment to France. In general, the district was peaceful after unrest at the beginning; the only disturbances came from the Sunnis and Greek Orthodox, who believed their interests were being neglected and demanded the attachment of the district to Syria.

Nationalism and the Minorities

563 The leaders of Arab nationalism in Syria recognize the import-
 668 ance of the minority problem and have made considerable efforts to win the confidence of the minorities. In principle they regard Arab Christians as on a level with Moslems inside the Arab community, once they are willing to accept their obligations as

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members of the Arab nation. As for the linguistic minorities, 563
they insist on a certain degree of assimilation, but there is no 668
question of treating them as inferiors because of their racial
origins.

They are opposed, however, to the grant of a special regime to minorities, since it would only perpetuate their difference; and even more strongly would they oppose any foreign intervention or influence in support of the minorities. In regard to the compact minorities, while they recognize the need for careful and tactful administration, they believe they are capable of giving such administration, and wholly reject the claims of the autonomists, both because the grant of autonomy would play into the hands of foreign powers eager to intervene, and because, so long as they remained autonomous, the minorities would never learn how to live with their fellow-nationals.

The Treaty of 1936 and the Minorities

The autonomy of Jebel Druze and the Alawis was brought to an end by the Franco-Syrian Treaty of 1936. In December of that year decrees were issued annexing the two Governments to the Syrian Republic as the Provinces of Jebel Druze and Latakia respectively. Certain safeguards were, however, provided for the special position of the two provinces. On the one hand, they were given a special administration and financial regime. On the other, the military convention attached to the Treaty stipulated for the maintenance of French troops in both districts for a period of five years from the coming into force of the Treaty.

At the same time, the administration of the Jazirah was placed under the control of the Government of Damascus; it had never been formally autonomous but in practice had been under direct French administration since the establishment of civil government there.

In each of these three districts there was a group which welcomed the union with Syria, and others who thought it in their interest to side with the nationalists who seemed to be the rising power. Others again did not object to incorporation in Syria, so long as the special position of the provinces was respected and they were fairly treated in such matters as government appointments. There were some, however, who desired to return to complete autonomy under French protection. From 1937

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 668 to 1939 this last group grew stronger, and more or less brought administration to a standstill. There were a number of reasons for this. The Government was hasty and tactless; some of its supporters were intolerant. The fears and suspicions of the minorities were too strong to be overcome in a few months, and there can be no doubt that they were played upon by some of the French officials who refused to accept the change of policy laid down in the Treaty of 1936.

In 1937 and again in 1939, Jebel Druze was disturbed. In Latakia discontent grew gradually but did not become serious until the rising of a section of the Alawis led by Suleiman Murshid, a self-made notable and self-styled god. In 1937 a section of the Kurds and of the Christians of the Jazirah caused disturbances. Their case was strengthened by the support of Cardinal Tappouni, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch. Again in 1939, there were manifestations on a large scale.

Meanwhile, relations between the French Government and the nationalists had been growing worse, owing to the reluctance of the former to secure the ratification of the Treaty. By 1939, France had reversed the policy inaugurated in 1936. In July 1939, the Constitution was suspended. Almost simultaneously decrees were issued restoring the autonomy of the Jebel Druze and the Alawis. At the same time the Jazirah was placed once more under direct French rule; but by December 1940, matters had returned to normal and, once more, the authority of the Syrian Government was imposed in the Jazirah.

It was not only the compact minorities which had been restless during these years. The scattered minorities also had been apprehensive of nationalist policy towards them. They had not been persecuted on any large scale, and officially the Government had frequently declared its desire to treat all citizens equally; but there had been enough acts of discrimination to appear to justify the pre-conceived fears of the minorities. It was partly to allay these fears that the Syrian Government concluded supplementary agreements with the French Government in 1937 and 1938, containing among other things guarantees for the position of communities and individuals.

The difficulties of the situation must not, however, be exaggerated. Not all minorities were equally hostile to nationalism. Those which were most hostile were the Catholics, who had profited most from French rule; others, like the Greek Orthodox

and a section of the Armenians, were able to maintain good relations with the Government. In general, what troubles occurred were no more than were inevitable in a period of transition. 648 563

Developments since 1941

In September 1941, General Catroux proclaimed the independence of Syria. His proclamation contained the following statement about minorities: 648

Free France considers that the State of Syria forms politically and territorially an indivisible unity, of which the integrity ought to be preserved against any dismemberment. In consequence she will look with favour upon the strengthening of the political, cultural, and economic links which unite the different portions of Syria. To this end, the Delegate-General and Plenipotentiary of Free France will revise the texts defining the particular status formerly accorded to certain regions, in such a way that, while the administrative and financial autonomy to which they show themselves firmly attached is preserved, they shall be politically subordinated to the Syrian central power. Thus the principle of Syrian unity and the particular aspirations of these regions will be reconciled.

It remains understood, moreover, that the guarantees of public right set out in the organic statutes in favour of individuals and of communities will be maintained and given full effect.¹

In accordance with these principles, the two autonomous territories were re-attached to the rest of Syria. Thus, the first Government formed after the proclamation contained a Druze and an Alawi Minister; and in February 1942, the two provinces were once more formally annexed to Syria, with provisions for a special administrative and financial regime. In September 1944 the Administrative Council of Jebel Druze voted unanimously for the abrogation of its special regime and complete incorporation in the Syrian State. 631 563

In the summer of 1943, elections were held and subsequently a nationalist government took office. As formerly, the Chamber contained representatives of the minorities and the Cabinet a Christian minister. The Government made clear its intention of treating all members of the community on a footing of complete 642 641 563

¹ General Catroux's Proclamation of Syrian Independence, September 28, 1941. *Journal Officiel de la France Libre* (London), Première année, No. 13, December 9, 1941.

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563 equality but, at the same time, of making its authority respected by all alike. In spite of these declarations, however, there were a series of petty incidents in 1944 which aroused the fears of some of the minorities: for example, local disorders and alleged injustices in government appointments. In some parts of the country, moreover, the Government had difficulty in imposing its authority. This was particularly true of the Alawi district, where Suleiman Murshid and his associates caused trouble; the Jazirah also was not quiet. There were a number of reasons for these difficulties: it was inevitable that the minorities should still retain their old fears of Sunni domination; it was no less natural that in a time of administrative changes certain local officials should abuse their powers and indulge their prejudices; it was unavoidable that families and groups should be disappointed when official appointments were made, and should blame the Government's choice on religious prejudice. None of these, however, was the most important reason. That was to be found in the strained state of relations between the French and the nationalists in Syria. So long as France continued to deny the claim of the nationalists to full independence, they could not help feeling a certain resentment against the minorities who had so often been used as tools of French policy.

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563 In 1945, after the Franco-Syrian crisis in the course of which Damascus was bombarded, Franco-Syrian political relations were at last regulated, and agreement was reached for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Syrian soil. The withdrawal took place in 1946, and thus the essential condition for the establishment of normal relations between majority and minorities was fulfilled.

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⁷⁹⁵ of the property, the finances, and the philanthropic and educational activities of the church. A board of five men, all laymen, is chosen by the council to have charge of the schools. These 6 schools make a complete kindergarten, primary, and secondary ladder by themselves, consisting of 2 boys primary schools, 2 girls primary schools (1 of which is topped by an intermediate section), a coeducational primary school, and a complete secondary school for boys. Girls leaving the girls intermediate may join the secondary classes at the boys secondary school, and in 1945-46 there were 5 girls who had done this.

The schools are supported by fees, by income from the church endowment and property, by grants from the government, and by contributions. The buildings are owned by the Greek Orthodox church and community. The student body, though predominately Greek Orthodox, has students from other denominations. The boys secondary school, for example, has about 40 Muslims, 25 Jews, and 20 Catholics. The teaching staff of the school is also mixed: 16 Greek Orthodox, 5 Muslims, 2 Jews, and 3 Catholics. Fees are £S6 to £S90 in the primary schools and £S20 to £S200 in the secondary schools.

All pupils whose families receive help from the welfare society of the Greek Orthodox community are exempt from fees. Other pupils pay according to ability after inquiry by the priests and the committee.

In general, the curriculum follows that of the government, but with two important differences. French is begun in the first primary grade, and English in the first secondary grade. Arabic reading is begun toward the end of the first kindergarten year and continued in the second kindergarten year. By the time the children enter first grade, they know how to read. The first grade is, therefore, in reality equivalent to the second grade of the government schools; and, although the primary school is nominally five years, it is in actual fact six years. The first-grade children appear to be above the average age. This procedure may perhaps have been necessitated by the early teaching of French.

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[91] The problem of teaching a multiplicity of languages in primary schools is found in an extreme form in Armenian schools. The largest Armenian community in Syria is in Aleppo where Armenians took refuge after the Armenian massacres in Turkey during the First World War. Anxious to preserve their national language and to know the language of the country of their adoption, they have had to teach both Arabic and Armenian. At the same time the advantages that accrued to those who knew French under the mandate made them introduce that language into their schools, while the fact that most Armenian youth who wanted to continue their

PRIVATE AND FOREIGN SCHOOLS

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education preferred an American school forced them to teach English as well. 563
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This situation is well illustrated by the 2 Giligian primary schools in Aleppo—1 for boys and 1 for girls. Both are under the same principal. The boys school had in 1945-46 an attendance of 254 boys, while the girls school had 228 girls. The kindergarten department in connection with the latter had 240 boys and girls in four sections, one section of which had 72 children. Naturally, the teacher could do little more than watch over the children. In these schools Armenian is begun in the upper section of the kindergarten, Arabic in the first grade, English in the second grade, and French in the third. Previously, however, it was the practice to begin French in the first grade.

In order to provide for a program so heavily loaded with languages, each grade has an average of thirty-six to thirty-seven periods a week. The program also extends over six years instead of the usual five years of the public schools. The schools are housed in rented houses, and are supported mostly by fees ranging from £S30-£S60 a year. About 65 boys and girls are exempted. The government pays a grant of £S750 a year and the salary of one teacher which it supplies. The other teachers are graduates of American secondary schools, holders of the second *baccalauréat*, or women who have had some secondary studies. Two are from the Armenian secondary school in Istanbul, Turkey, while five men and women are graduates of the Armenian teachers college in Nicosia, Cyprus. This is an institution offering a course of three years above the secondary school for the education of teachers for Armenian schools.

While Orthodox schools are mostly controlled by laymen's councils of the community with the clergy in the background, the Catholic schools are controlled to a considerable extent and often directly by the clergy. 795
873* The 3 Catholic private schools visited by the Commission in Syria were of this nature. A Catholic primary school in Aleppo was under the supervision of the Bishop of Aleppo and supported by him. The Maronite school for boys is headed by a priest and housed in a building belonging to the church. Its deficit is met by the Maronite welfare committee. A Maronite girls school in Latakia is conducted by the Maronite nuns of the Holy Family commonly known as the "nuns of 'Ibrin," a village in Lebanon where the mother convent is located. In all these schools French is stressed, except that the latter school by agreement with the government begins the teaching of French in the fourth grade.

The final type of private school is the nonsectarian school maintained either by groups and societies or by individuals. 873*
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sion hospital clinic in Deir ez Zor,^{14, 18} the prevalence among the Bedouin has been estimated at 50 to 90 per cent and among the seminomadic Arab townsmen at 20 to 35 per cent.

The facilities for the diagnosis and the treatment of venereal diseases are meager. As of 1951, the Ministry of Health operated special venereal disease hospitals and outpatient clinics in Damascus and Aleppo. It also maintained 2 mobile dispensaries for the treatment of syphilis and bejel in the eastern provinces. A campaign for the mass treatment of bejel and syphilis was initiated in 1952 by the Ministry, in co-operation with the World Health Organization and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. The findings of the various field units should eventually provide a comprehensive picture of the distribution and the prevalence of these diseases in eastern Syria.

Diseases of the Eyes. Trachoma is a major public health problem in all parts of the country, although it varies in prominence under urban and rural conditions. The infection rates usually average less than 10 per cent in the cities, but approximate 40 to 60 per cent in the rural areas, where over two thirds of the people live. Repeated surveys among school groups in northern Syria²¹ indicate that slightly more than 5 per cent of the children in Aleppo are affected, in contrast with 30 to 40 per cent in the environs of the city and 60 per cent in the rural villages. The disease exists at all levels of society, but is less frequent among the nomadic tribes than among the settled communities in the same general region. Differences in prevalence, influenced by local customs, are also noted among the various racial and religious groups. In a survey covering mountainous and coastal areas of Latakia *muhafazat*, reported in 1933,²² the highest infection rates were found in the predominantly Alawite districts. The index of infection averaged 44 per cent. It ranged from 25 per cent among the Armenians to 61 per cent among the

164 Alawites and 68 per cent among the Ismail-
563 ites. Trachoma is one of the principal causes
of blindness, in spite of the fact that, in the
opinion of many local observers, a large
percentage of uncomplicated cases exhibit
a tendency to spontaneous cure.

164 Gonococcal and other types of infectious
conjunctivitis are common. In a series of
315 conjunctival examinations, reported in
1931,¹⁸ from the mission hospital at Deir es
Zor, *Hemophilus lacumatus* (Morax-Azen-
feld bacillus) was identified in 34 per cent,
H. conjunctivitis (Koch-Weeks bacillus)
in about 10 per cent and *Neisseria gonor-
rhoeae* in 5 per cent, while different pyo-
genic cocci were found in the remainder.

164 Diseases of the Skin. As is to be ex-
515 pected, in view of the widespread ignorance
758 of the principles of personal hygiene and
the scarcity of water in many areas, skin
diseases are prevalent. They represented al-
most 10 per cent of the total cases treated
in government hospitals and clinics in 1949.

164 Mycotic infections are numerous, with ring-
361 worm of the scalp predominating in most
511 localities. Impetigo and scabies are wide-
spread, particularly among children in the
rural villages. Pediculosis is almost uni-
versal among the inhabitants of the poorer,
congested communities, both urban and
rural. Occasional cases of human myiasis
are encountered. A form of dermatitis,
caused by the bite of *Phlebotomus papatasi*
and other sandflies, is sometimes encoun-
tered among susceptible individuals in the
summer months.

164 Leprosy. Endemic foci of leprosy exist
in various parts of the country, but pri-
marily in Hauran and Latakia provinces.
The extent of infection is not accurately
known, and estimates of prevalence range
from 90 to 250 cases. A few new cases are
[143] reported each year. Theoretically, isolation
is compulsory, and the Ministry of Health
maintains a leprosarium at Douma, near
Damascus, which has facilities for the care
of about 75 lepers.

752 Rabies. Sporadic cases of rabies are re-
164 ported. The majority result from the bites

CHAPTER V

SYRIA

In Syria, where the idea of Arab independence found some of its earliest protagonists, nationalism has been marked by a special degree of ill-temper, perhaps because the masses of the larger towns—Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, etc.—at an early stage became an object of political manoeuvring. 186 669

Anti-foreign feelings had been aroused as early as 1925, when clashes with the French Mandatory régime led to the bombardment of Damascus. After the Palestine Arab Revolt of 1936, Syria became a refuge for Palestinian Arab terrorists on the run. Fawzi Kaukji—an Albanian adventurer specialising in gun-running and gang warfare on behalf of Arab extremists—Amin al Hussein—the ex-Mufti of Jerusalem—and many other "wanted" disturbers of the peace found fertile soil for their activities in Syria.

Here the connection between Arab nationalism and Muslim fanaticism was particularly close, and even sermons in the Mosques frequently descended to the level of vicious and inflammatory diatribes against non-believers. As early as October, 1945, the leader of the "Young Muslims' Association," Sheikh Mustafa al-Sibaj, in a violent speech after the Friday midday prayers in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, threatened the Jews in Arab countries with disaster "if the Palestine problem is not solved in favour of the Arabs."

These characteristics of Arab nationalism in Syria have had their effect not only on the Jews but on the Christian minority also. Hence the attractiveness of neighbouring Lebanon, with its security of life for minorities, as a goal for Christian emigration. The same was true as regards the Jews of Syria, a steady stream of whom has been moving to Lebanon for the last 25 years. The early trickle has recently become so great in volume that, by now, it is believed that only a few remnants of the Jewish population are left in the two big towns of Aleppo and Damascus. 568 668

The last census—that of 1943—gave the number of Jews in Syria as 29,770 out of a total population of 2,860,411 (of whom 2,424,817 were Muslims). The majority of the Jews used to live in Aleppo and Damascus, with about 17,000 in Aleppo (compared with 35,000 in 1910) and 11,000 in Damascus. The remainder, rather isolated, dwelt mostly in the north-eastern province of Jezirah, where they had settled in 1924, along with Armenians, Kurds, and Assyrians from Turkey and Iraq. Of the 29,000 Jews in Syria in 1943, about 15,000 had left the country by 1947. At that time, there still remained about 10,000-11,000 in Aleppo and about 2,500-3,000 in Damascus. Less than 1,000 162 167

162 were left in the Jezirah district. An additional 5,000-6,000 Jews
167 emigrated at the beginning of 1948, leaving a total of about 9,000, with
4,500 in Aleppo, 4,000 in Damascus, and 500 in the Jezirah district.
Further emigration took place that year; and it is estimated that there
are now fewer than 6,000 left in the whole country.

This exodus was the culmination of many years of intimidation,
material decline, and moral isolation. The smaller community in
Damascus had always been poor. About 80 per cent earned their
living as labourers and pedlars; approximately 15 per cent were able
to maintain a slightly higher standard; while only 5 per cent were able
to make a good living, mostly in commerce. The Aleppo community
had in bygone days been prosperous and had been an active and
important element of the city's once flourishing commerce. The rapid
deterioration of conditions, however, made itself felt particularly
strongly among the Jews of Aleppo; and since the wealthy were the
first to leave the country, the remainder were impoverished even more
swiftly.

197 Although knowledge of French is widespread among educated
563 Jews, the every-day language of the majority is either Arabic or Ladino.
There are two *Alliance Israélite Universelle* schools, one in Aleppo
and the other in Damascus. Since the convocation of the first
Parliament in December, 1936, there has been one Jewish representative
in the Chamber of Deputies. He was, it is true, allowed to retain
his seat even when persecution of the Jews reached its height. But,
isolated as he was in a sea of feverish hostility, there was little he could
do to alleviate the situation.

In 1945, a meeting of Islamic religious leaders in Damascus,
presided over by the Mufti of Damascus, sent a telegram to the Allied
Governments, threatening that a Holy War against the Jews would be
declared by all Islamic countries if Jewish immigration into Palestine
continued. Within a month, this action and similar incitement from
high quarters, coupled as they were with a violent anti-Jewish press
campaign, bore fruit.

[579] On the Muslim holiday of Qurban Bairam, on November 18, an
563 infuriated mob, goaded on by a group of students, broke into the Great
668 Synagogue in Aleppo, smashed the candle burning in front of the Ark,
battered some old Jews who were praying, and burnt the prayer books.

This was the signal for the outbreak of a general anti-Jewish
campaign, made the worse by the incessant agitation carried on by
nationalist orators among the Arab masses. There was the ugly
murder of Jacques Franco, Assistant Headmaster of the *Alliance*
School in Damascus. Suspicion that his death was the result of the
prevailing unrest has never been entirely removed, even though there
is insufficient evidence to prove it. There was the forcing of Rabbi
Moshe Nahum, of the Jewish community of Jezirah, to make a state-
ment protesting against Jewish immigration into Palestine. There was
the humiliating spectacle of the heads of all three Jewish communities

being compelled, in November, 1945, to take part in the demonstrations 563
against the Balfour Declaration, and Jewish shopkeepers being ordered 668
to close their shops as a sign of solidarity with the Muslims. However
little concerned Syrian Jewry may have been with Zionist aspirations
in Palestine, its feelings on the subject could hardly have been strong
enough to cause its leaders—"of their own free will"—to announce
that they intended to hold a banquet in honour of the notorious Fawzi
Kaukji—a wartime officer of the German Waffen S.S.

Not even in Egypt did public hysteria against the helpless and
isolated Jewish minority go to such lengths as it did in Syria. Doubt-
less this fact is due to the combination of a half-educated university
youth and an illiterate, hungry, and disease-ridden urban populace. In
Syria, as in Egypt, such a combination has given an extraordinarily
explosive character to the nationalist movement.

When the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on the Palestine 648
issue visited Syria, its members were struck by the cowed and 563
intimidated manner of the heads of the Jewish community. One member
of the committee, Mr. Bartley Crum, in his book *Behind the Silken
Curtain* (p. 239), gives the following description of the scene when
three representatives of the Jewish community arrived to give evidence:

The committee of three chosen Jews appeared. Only one spoke.
There had been testimony in Jerusalem before us by Oriental Jews
charging that Jews in the Oriental countries were given only second-
class citizenship. Our sub-committee expected the Jewish spokesman
they now heard on the scene to need far more than 20 minutes to tell
his story. Instead, he used 45 seconds of his allotted time. He raced
through a one-sentence written statement, in which he said that the Jews
of Syria were happy and not discriminated against; that their situation
was excellent under the present Syrian Government; and that they
had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with Zionism. The three
presented a picture of terrified men. . . .

The tragic farce of the repeated declarations of solidarity with the
Muslims forced on the leaders of the Jewish community did not
diminish the flood of persecution. Thus Shukri al-Quwatli, the President
of the Syrian Republic, made no effort to halt anti-Jewish dis-
crimination, even though in 1946 a Jewish delegation made special
representations to him. On the contrary, in 1947, the Syrian Govern-
ment promulgated new restrictions, prohibiting Jewish inhabitants from
leaving their areas of residence.

The effect of this order was to paralyse even what remained of
Jewish economic activity; and it should be noted that the order
appeared even before the partition of Palestine was decided on by the
United Nations.

Within four days of the United Nations decision being made 648
public, the mob was sufficiently worked up for anti-Jewish rioting to 563
break out in Aleppo. On December 2, 1947, a crowd, spurred on 579
by agitators, burnt down the four big synagogues in the city plus

648 14 smaller ones, and destroyed 150 houses. An unknown number of
563 Jews was butchered to death.

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By the time Palestine was invaded by the Arab States, the Jewish communities in Syria were completely isolated. No Jew dared to have any contacts abroad or, for that matter, with any foreigners resident in the country. Commercial activity came practically to a standstill, since Jews were forbidden to open their shops or to carry on with their employment.

The property of a transport company, owned by an Iraqi Jew, was confiscated, and the entire Jewish staff arrested. Fifteen Jewish girls who worked in the telephone exchanges in Aleppo and Damascus were dismissed. The Chief Engineer of Damascus, who had held this position for 12 years, suffered the same fate, together with five Jewish school teachers. The school building of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in Damascus was requisitioned for the military. The already impoverished community was forced under threat to donate about £510,000 (at that time equivalent to £1,100) to the Arab funds.

Throughout the months of fighting, a relentless campaign demanding the confiscation of all Jewish property went on. The Damascus Jews felt themselves fortunate in being spared a repetition of the earlier Aleppo riots, though in August, 1949, 11 were killed when a bomb was thrown into a synagogue.

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For some time the situation of the Jews in Damascus was extremely grave. Being prevented from earning a living, the community was so impoverished that it was feared that many would die of hunger and disease. Had it not been for the assistance of the Jewish community in Beirut, the Damascus community might well have perished. Later, their straits were further relieved by American help.

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With the overthrow of the Syrian Government by Husni Zaim in March, 1949, all restrictions on the movements of Jews, as well as on the sale of property, were abolished. The new ruler declared that he would deal severely with any person attempting to discriminate against the Jews. The lifting of the travel ban was immediately followed by a new wave of Jewish emigration to Lebanon.

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The confused situation arising out of Zaim's murder, and the succession of political coups which followed, make the prospects of the Jewish community uncertain. But even if the new Government were to abstain from any official discrimination against the Jews of Syria, the atmosphere has been poisoned to such an extent that a return to normal conditions and peaceful relations seems most unlikely. On the face of it, nothing will alter the passionate wish of practically every Jew in Syria to shake the country's dust off his feet.